

Developing the Supplier Capability Assessment Process

Need to ramp up supplier capability assessment

The situation:

Following two rounds of assessment using the original Capability Assessment Toolkit (CAT), suppliers' performance had improved to the point that there was little stretch left in the process. It needed to be reshaped to meet the Highways Agency's evolving needs and to continue challenging suppliers to improve. The HA set up an Industry Advisory Group (IAG) with themselves, suppliers and assessors, collaborating to develop the next generation of capability assessment. They asked me to join, and to facilitate the IAG.

Restructure process in collaboration, and develop training and peer review

My work:

My work included:

- establishing the set of design principles which underpinned the development of the next level of capability assessment (CAT3);
- leading two of the three subgroups to develop the detail of CAT3;
- developing and delivering a ground-breaking training programme in which suppliers and assessors learned together;
- developing and delivering a peer review process to ensure the quality of feedback and validity of scores;
- continuing my role as lead assessor to maintain my experience;
- restructuring the training programme for new entrants to CAT3.

Improved supplier capability substantially and promoted key aspects of government agenda

The outcome:

The capability assessment process has been extremely successful for the Highways Agency. They feel it has provided value for money, and shown that they engage and encourage development of their supply chain in key aspects of the government agenda. The Department for Transport and others have commended the approach as a proactive and proportionate response to issues such as assessing diversity. CAT has highlighted general strengths and areas for improvement across the supply chain, giving the HA the insight to tackle some of these issues. By the completion of CAT3, high levels of capability were being demonstrated across the field, giving the HA a level of assurance that all their key suppliers are highly capable organisations.

Making it deliver and continually finding the potential for it to deliver more

The Goldsmith factor:

The value I added was to develop and implement approaches that delivered to the HA agenda as my client, yet kept all the other stakeholders positively engaged in the process. An essential element has been my ability to tune into the varying (sometimes competing) stakeholder agendas. I continued to uncover within the approach the capacity to improve and improve. By listening, balancing competing needs, drawing on my own and others' experiences, I have been able to make the process respond, and to resolve constraints that could have limited its value. Continuing to demand more of the process grew its credibility in the face of significant doubts from some stakeholders. Despite the change in focus, key elements of CAT have evolved to underpin the replacement strategic alignment process.